

Battalion beats Iraq's heat with water, shade

BY RICK EMERT

Stars and Stripes

MOSUL, Iraq — In the mid-afternoon sun of Iraq's summer, thoughts cling hopefully to ideas such as: "At least it's a dry heat, and there is a breeze."

But the body knows that the dry heat can feel like the blast escaping from a just-opened, preheated oven, and the breeze can feel like an industrial-strength hair dryer turned on super-max high.

At this time of day, even the critters look for shade.

But soldiers of the 94th Engineer Combat Battalion (Heavy) usually don't have the luxury of taking a break to find some shade.

On Forward Operating Base Marez, the battalion's home base in Iraq, soldiers spend a lot of time working on their vehicles and on base construction projects. In other areas, such as Rawah — close to the Syrian border — soldiers are also involved in construction missions.

Much of their work is the kind of strenuous physical labor that could make one break a sweat on a January day in Michigan. But it has to be done, blistering heat or not.

None of the soldiers has suffered a serious heat injury, like heat stroke, as the temperature soars close to 120 degrees on some days, said Sgt. Dorniney Dorniney, a medic and assistant noncommissioned officer in charge for the 94th Engineers' aid station.

The unit follows the Army's



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Cpl. Walter Morgan of the 535th Engineer Company (Combat Support Equipment) washes his Humvee with a pressure sprayer Thursday at Forward Operating Base Marez in Mosul, Iraq. Some of the soldiers' daily duties, like this one, help them cool down a little as summer temperatures climb up to 120 degrees.

heat category guidelines, a system that uses three methods of measuring temperature and combines them to gauge how long soldiers should work and rest during an hour. For example, in heat category 5, the highest, soldiers doing strenuous work should work for 10 minutes and then rest for 50 minutes by doing light work or standing in shade.

"It's only a guideline for when we're in a training environment," Dorniney said. "In a combat zone, it's a different story. You can't always follow that."

But leaders take those steps to

help soldiers avoid the heat of the day.

The unit has implemented night shifts for some crews, and many soldiers who have to work outside during the day extend their work days to avoid the mid-afternoon heat.

"Most of them will work until it gets really hot at about (3 p.m.) then take a break and come back at (5 p.m.) and work a few more hours," said Sgt. 1st Class Dennis Hughes, operations noncommissioned officer for the battalion.

And the soldiers know that the best defense against the heat

comes in the liter-size bottles of water that are free and available at points all over Marez.

Many of the soldiers, like Hughes, freeze water overnight so that it will remain cold longer during the day.

Soldiers also have packets of Gatorade to mix with the water to replace the body's electrolytes. The loss of electrolytes can cause dehydration and over-hydration.

"Over-hydration is caused by not eating enough and drinking so much water that electrolytes are flushed from the body," Dorniney said. To prevent over-hydrat-

ion, soldiers should eat three meals a day, which also replaces the salt content they lose from sweating, she said.

The soldiers have adjusted over the past couple of months to Iraq's summer, which is hottest in August, and they say a good defense against the heat is to not think about it.

"If you're on a convoy in a vehicle without air conditioning, you just have to suck it up," said Cpl. John Stump, 535th Engineer Company (Combat Support Equipment).

"I try not to think about it too much," said Sgt. Ivan Andrei, also from 535th Engineers. "There is no escaping it. It's hot during the day, and it's hot at night."

"(Chewing tobacco) and cigarettes help you forget about the heat," said Spc. Jeffrey Campbell of the 535th Engineers. "It keeps your mind off the heat and helps you stay in a good mood."

But soldiers should limit their nicotine and caffeine intake in the heat, even though energy drinks and caffeine-rich sodas help the crews stay energized. Caffeine dehydrates the body and nicotine constricts the blood vessels, making the heart work harder, Dorniney said.

Possibly the best defense against the heat is good old-fashioned common sense.

"Drink lots of water and grab some shade whenever you can," said Spc. Michael Beesley of the 535th Engineers. "That's all you can do."

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'One Woman' tells her story of Abu Ghraib

The Associated Press

Iraqi prisoners could lift their cell doors right off their hinges. One senior sergeant whiled away his evenings blasting grazing sheep with a guard-tower machine gun. U.S. commanders didn't bother telling their troops they'd be stuck in Iraq for months more than advertised.

The only female commanding general in the war zone, Abu Ghraib prison chief Janis Karpinski, has written a memoir of her fateful year there, a candid portrait of an often dysfunctional U.S. Army — of "Sergeant Bilko meets Catch 22," as she puts it.

The book, "One Woman's Army," published by Hyperion, sheds little new light on the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal, in which Karpinski, an Army Reserve brigadier general, was the highest-ranking officer punished, being relieved of her command, reprimanded and demoted to colonel.

Karpinski maintains she didn't know about the detainee torture and humiliation, that higher-ups encouraged the cruel treatment, and that male Army "Regulars" made her a scapegoat as a woman and a reservist.



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